

## SECTION 5. DEVELOPING WATERSHED INFORMATION CLEARINGHOUSES

Information management and communication support are key areas that could contribute to the growth of the watershed approach and improve the effectiveness of existing partnerships in the Pacific Northwest. The level of interest and support for the clearinghouse concept is impressive. The need for a universally accessible information source was identified in the interviews. The recognized need and support for the concept represent a service opportunity for agencies capable of extending support to watersheds to assist the partners in establishing clearinghouses. The following issues identified by project participants should be addressed in taking the next steps to establish individual watershed information clearinghouses, and to build a more comprehensive information management and communication support network for the watershed approach.

- 1) Identifying Consensus Recommendations of Potential Clearinghouse Partners: This project was not a survey and its geographic focus was limited to Washington state. Region 10 may want to consider a survey of states to determine if the recommendation identified in this report is applicable to other states. The survey could collect recommendations for alternative approaches to satisfy information management and communication support needs.
- 2) Clearinghouse Boundaries: Scaling and Nesting to Achieve Integrated Geographic Coverage: Boundaries that define the service areas of the watershed information clearinghouses need to be established. A consensus among watershed partners on boundaries would allow individual partners to begin forming the necessary agreements for the clearinghouse. Defining the hydrologic boundaries would also guide the process of indexing information to "nested" units ensuring integration of available information from individual projects. One suggestion was to conduct a survey or workshop for the purpose of building a consensus response to this question.
- 3) Designing Information Clearinghouses: Interview participants identified several areas in the state that are prepared to begin design work on the watershed information clearinghouse (e.g., Nooksack). Figure C-2 (in Appendix C) identifies a seven-step method for developing an information management and communication support system. Pilot projects could be sponsored in a few locations to determine if a consistent design is possible for the clearinghouse.
- 4) Identifying Charter Issues: It would be useful to prepare an information resource document describing solutions to forming organizational units (such as private non-profit organizations) for the clearinghouse. The document would address issues such as shared funding, information management policies, and board structure and function, to name just a few.
- 5) Supporting and Tracking the Progress of Pilot Clearinghouses: The Yakima watershed

clearinghouse will begin to set up its operations over the next several months. Tracking its progress, EPA could identify critical needs and determine if there are mechanisms in place to provide the necessary support. With support, it would be possible to fund a periodic evaluation to determine how successful the clearinghouse is in meeting Yakima watershed partners' information management and communication needs.

6) Extending the Clearinghouse in a Use Analysis: It would be useful to develop a model for use in the designated service areas (e.g., WQMA) to determine the need, support, and critical functions of the proposed information clearinghouse. The WQMA watershed clearinghouse use analysis could address more topics and in greater detail than is possible in this project report. Example categories for the extended WQMA watershed clearinghouse use analysis are listed below:

- Identify the potential watershed clearinghouse constituency
- Collect recommendations for a clearinghouse mandate or charter
- Identify the monitoring and information collection activities of clearinghouse partners
- Describe the assessment objectives and methods of clearinghouse partners
- Describe the process used by individual partners to establish watershed priorities and describe the focus for priorities
- Evaluate the management strategy capabilities of watershed partners
- Define the products and services produced by watershed partners
- Assess the implementation capabilities of watershed partners

The use analysis report could be circulated among potential clearinghouse partners prior to convening a workshop to establish a clearinghouse. The report would provide background information on design questions to be addressed at the workshop.